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CONSOLATION FOR
MOTHERS WITH
EMPTY ARMS

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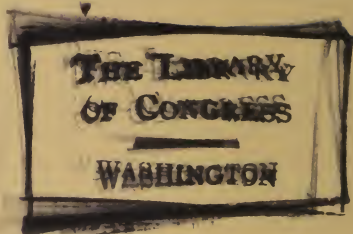
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CONSOLATION.

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 2 Cor. 1:4.

ONLY a mother can understand the love of a mother for her child. Life of her life, supremely her own by the claim of her suffering and self denial, surely there is no relationship in life closer and more tender than that between a mother and her child. From the instant of its birth the little one becomes an inseparable part of the mother's life. Its very helplessness and dependence

upon her for its every need make it more precious to her, and no human love so nearly approaches the divine love in its complete abnegation of self as does the love of a mother for her child.

It is to its mother that a little child turns instinctively in every distress, and one of the greatest joys of motherhood is the ability to soothe and comfort the little one. One of the most perfect expressions of the tenderness of God's love for his children is given in the passage, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." There is such comfort to a child in its mother's touch! Even though the loving arms about it cannot allay its distress or lessen its pain, yet as the child nestles against its mo-

ther's bosom it is comforted beneath all its troubles.

A little child interprets God's love to its mother's heart with a sweetness that she could never understand in any other way. The constant watchfulness, the tender care, the loving anxiety that her little one shall have every good thing, bring to her a realizing sense of God's care for his children. It is so tender and so close a tie that when it is sundered it is not strange that the mother's heart well-nigh breaks with desolation. Her arms ache with emptiness, and as she realizes that the precious little one has passed beyond her care life seems a dreary waste, with but little for which to live. Just because her life has centered in its life, be-

cause her every thought has been for its well-being, so now her loneliness is agonizing.

The tender baby life so soon weaves itself into all its surroundings that every inanimate thing about the house seems endowed with a power to arouse memories of the little one. Perhaps a mother who has never lost a child may fancy that through her very joy of possession she can measure the anguish of loss. When she has soothed her baby to rest and laid it in its snowy nest she gathers up the rumpled frock, the half-worn baby shoe, and with a swift rush of tears thinks she can feel the loneliness of her neighbor over the way, who sits in the empty nursery, listening in vain for the patter of little feet that are now treading

the street of the Celestial City. Yet I think that no one but a mother with empty arms can understand it all. Such little things can hurt us so cruelly. Not only the dainty garments, the toys that are never used now, the deep silence in the house that before was broken with sweet baby prattlings, but such unexpected things can open the flood-gates of grief. The chiming of a bell, the sound of a hand-organ, the flutter of a bird's wing past the window, and you can see again the dear eyes widen with pleased surprise that are closed now for ever upon earth, and you wonder sorrowfully how you can go on with life when it is so full of power to wound your bleeding heart at every turn. Ah, I know it all, and time has not

yet healed the soreness of the wound; and it is because I have been bereaved of the precious little life that was the light of our household and the joy of our hearts, and yet have been comforted even while I passed down into the valley of the shadow of death with my darling, that I want to comfort other mothers, if I may, with the comfort wherewith I was comforted of God.

However poorly I may fulfil my desire, and fail in imparting to others the peace which underlies all the agony of desolation, believe me that my heart goes out to a mother with empty arms with sympathy which only one who has passed through that sorrow can feel.

Death came to my little one as a tender

nurse to woo him away from a life of suffering and bear him to the tender keeping of the Good Shepherd. There was nothing terrible in his coming, and the look of peace that bloomed upon the tired baby face, as he passed from my arms to the embrace of the messenger who had watched with me for so many weary weeks, comforted me even in that moment of supreme anguish.

“It is well with the child.” Let that be our first thought. How gladly have we denied ourselves for the precious little ones, how gladly we would have laid down our lives to save them from suffering, if so we could have done it! And is there a mother heart among us who, even in the first agony of desolation, would call back her child from

the glory of heaven that her arms might be once more filled with their treasured burden? We who are mothers know how often our tenderest love and care have been impotent to save our children one pang, or soften the path which their tender baby feet must tread; and as years went by we would have found ourselves ever less and less able to shield them from suffering, sorrow, and temptation. Is it not compensation for our own loneliness to remember how infinitely *safe* our darlings are? Earth's tempest can never rage upon the heavenly shores; the dark shapes of temptation and sin have no place among the spotless inhabitants of the Celestial City; there shall be no sickness there, and God's own hand shall wipe away their tears.

We pray so earnestly for our little ones that God may bestow upon them his richest blessings and may keep them safe from every harm, yet when he grants the fullest answer to our heart's desire and takes our precious ones into his own keeping, we cry out in our loneliness, and forget their infinite gain in our own exceeding loss. What honor it is to be the mother of one of those white child-spirits about the throne; to know that the sweet baby voice that called "mother," or perhaps could only mimic our human speech in broken syllables, is now mingling with the choirs of heaven! When the stars come out, and you long to clasp the little creature of your care and love in your warm arms and soothe it to slumber, as mothers

all about you are doing, does it not comfort you, even though the hot tears course down your cheeks, to remember,

“Christ, the Good Shepherd, carries mine to-night,
And that is best.”

Do you ask why it is that other mothers still have their little ones, and are blessed with the sunshine of their smiles, the music of their happy voices, while your arms are empty? Why is it that everywhere you go you can see little lives that are unloved and uncherished, that are growing up in neglect, squalor, and vice, and living in defiance of every known law of hygiene, while your beloved child was taken from you, though you cherished it most tenderly and neglected nothing that love and skill could prompt?

Those are indeed unanswerable questions, but I think there is a great peace in the knowledge that because it is God's way it is of necessity right beyond question. In this matter let us trust our Father's love just as implicitly as our little ones trusted us. How often have we had to thwart their wishes and inclinations for their best and highest good. Did they love us the less, or question our right? Nothing is more beautiful than the trust of a little child, and we will find peace in trusting like one of these.

It may be that it was in love for the child that it was early transplanted. Travelling through Scotland, where the sheep graze all the year through upon the velvety shoulders of the great Bens, I noticed stone

enclosures here and there, protected from the cold winds by trees. I asked a shepherd what those enclosures were, and he told me they were folds for "the weaklings and the wee lambs," where the shepherd brought them when the storms were gathering. Was it not in tenderness that the shepherd folded the weak ones and the little lambs? Is the Good Shepherd less tender? We do not know what storms our precious wee lambs have escaped by being folded so early. It may be that if they had been spared to us we should have had occasion to shed far more bitter tears than those which now fill our eyes. Such grief would have blinded us, but the tears we shed over our little ones in the heavenly fold become lenses through

which we catch glimpses of the glory and radiance into which they have entered. If our love can only be unselfish enough to rise above our loneliness and desolation, can we not be almost exultant at the thought of the blessedness into which our child has entered?

All the loss is ours, and the gain is all for the little one who passed so unconsciously from our arms to the Good Shepherd's keeping.

“ Well done of God to halve the lot
To give her all the sweetness :
To us the empty room and crib,
To her all heaven's completeness.”

Death has no terror for a little child.
It but falls asleep never to waken again to

pain or sorrow. The little white casket is no less tender a resting-place than the snowy crib. Would you, if you could, waken the peaceful slumberer? You know how full this world is of disappointment and heartache and temptation, and you know how blessed beyond human conception is the little one whom Christ has taken into his own keeping. Those tiny hands, as fair as if an artist had sculptured them from marble, need never bear life's burdens now. The little feet, so strangely quiet, will never tread the rough places in life's path. The rare sweet blossoms which your loving hands have showered about the beautiful baby form may fade, but in the heavenly gardens the flowers are fadeless, and it is in those gardens that

the sweet child-spirit will roam. Ah, even while your heart seems rent with the anguish of parting, you know that indeed "it is well with the child."

It may be for our own sakes that God has taken our little one. When a shepherd wants a sheep to follow him and she will not heed his call, although he wants to lead her to new pastures where the pasturage will be fresher and more plentiful, he lifts her little lamb in his arms and carries it away from her to the place where he would lead her. The sheep will follow her little one, although she would not heed the shepherd's voice. It may be that we have not heeded the voice of the Good Shepherd, and so he has lifted our little one in his arms and taken it to the

green fields of the heavenly Canaan that we may follow him more closely than we have ever done before. Surely any loss which brings us closer to the loving heart of Christ is immeasurable gain.

It may be, too, that it is by this very bereavement that God has "set us free to serve." After our tutelage in caring for and ministering to these precious little ones of our care we shall know better how to care for those who need tenderness and gentle ministrations. The world is so full of those who suffer, and it may be that after we have served an apprenticeship beside our own little one, in the instructive school of sorrow, we may be fitted, as we could never be otherwise, to minister to others "In His

Name." Out of our very loss we can give to others,

"For those who suffer most have most to give."

Surely we would not shrink away from the pain, the bitter discipline by which God would fit us for service, if because our hearts have been broken we can pour the oil of healing into other wounded hearts. If we find that through suffering God enriches our natures so that we are fitted for the ministry of grief to grief, and we can comfort aching hearts as we could not if we had known only joy, surely we will not murmur because it was at the cost of our dearest treasure that we were fitted for service.

It is a great honor when God gives us

suffering to bear for him, and it should be our prayer that we may prove ourselves worthy of it. We may have an opportunity to glorify him in the hour of suffering or bereavement as we never could in the sunlight of prosperity.

We do trust our Father's love and wisdom, and believe that "He doeth all things well." Let us, even in the first hour of desolation, be careful to prove that God can not send any sorrow which is too great for his love to comfort, and even as we have comforted our children let us be comforted now by the infinite tenderness of the heart of God, which suffers in our pain as we have suffered with our children.

Grief is natural. God has given us our

children to love even as he loves us, as far as our weak earthly love can be measured beside his infinite tenderness. The rending asunder of the tie so close and dear must cost us anguish and bitter tears, but let us be careful that our eyes are not so blinded with tears that we miss the blessing that God means to bestow on us. He has emptied our hands of the cares and duties of motherhood, which were so precious to us, that he might fill them with other tasks.

Because our darlings are beyond our care and are so tenderly cherished of Christ, let us look for the desolate, unloved ones upon earth and minister to them with the tenderness we learned in caring for the child of our love. Because no tears can dim the

dear baby's eyes in which you once saw your own reflected, dry the tears of some other little one who may never have known the tenderness of a mother's love. Let us fill our lives with helpfulness to others, as a living memorial of our love for our precious child. No costly sculpture nor glowing window can take the place of loving deeds and gentle ministrations. Let, rather, our life be so full of beautiful deeds done "In His Name," and in gratitude for the little one who nestled against our heart long enough to fill it with the holy joy of motherhood, that God's love shining through it may make the self-sacrifice, the tenderness, and the giving royally of all that we have and are to the service of others, glow like the crimson

and blue and purple in some cathedral window—a memorial that shall be a blessing to ourselves and others. There is nothing that will so soon bring comfort to a desolate heart as the effort to comfort another. It is something to be very thankful for, if God fills our empty hands with tasks for others. Thank him for the smallest opportunity of helpfulness to others, for each will be a stepping-stone up from the depths of sorrow.

Only in self-forgetfulness can we find peace. Not happiness, for it will be long, if ever, before the sight of a baby's dimpled hand or downy head resting against a mother's cheek will lose its power to hurt you sorely, yet these hurts will be like the tossing waves of the sea, only upon the

surface, while in the depths will abide an eternal calm.

“ Then nestle your hand in the Father's,
And sing, if you can, as you go,
Your song may cheer some one behind you
Whose courage is sinking low.
And, well, if your lips *do* quiver,
God will love you better so.”

MATER DOLOROSA.

BECAUSE of little low-laid heads all crowned
 With golden hair,
Forevermore all fair young brows to me
 A halo wear.
I kiss them reverently. Alas ! I know
 The stains I bear.

Because of dear but close-shut holy eyes
 Of heaven's own blue,
All little eyes do fill my own with tears,
 Whate'er their hue ;
And motherly I gaze their innocent
 Clear depths into.

Because of little pallid lips which once
 My name did call,
No childish voice in vain appeal upon
 My ear doth fall.
I count it all my joy their joys to share
 And sorrows small.

Because of little dimpled cherished hands
Which folded lie,
All little hands henceforth to me do have
A pleading cry ;
I clasp them as they were small wandering birds
Lured home to fly.

Because of little death-cold feet, for earth's
Rough roads unmeet,
I'd journey leagues to save from sin or harm
Such little feet,
And count the lowliest service done for them
So sacred—sweet !

THE BABY'S STOCKING.

THE baby's stocking ! Such a dainty thing,
Which like the bud sheath of a flower is shaped
By the pink foot, that with its blossom twin
But scarcely from the silken mesh escaped.

I wonder if a thing so soft and small
In every mother's heart hath potent power
To waken such an ecstasy of joy
As that which surges through my heart this hour.

The Christmas bells ring out their merriest peals,
As I sit here beside the downy nest
Where like a rosy cherub, flushed with sleep,
Breathing so stilly, lies my boy at rest.

Ah, dainty stocking, you are far too small
To hold of all my gifts aught but the least ;
Nay, baby king, the very world would fail
To span my love's desire from west to east.

What would I give to thee, beloved ? Nay,
Ask rather is there aught I would not give
To crown with all completeness thy sweet life,
In whose fair opening radiance I live.

The music of the Christmas bells chimes on,
The Christmas stars look down with tender light
As I the baby's stocking softly fill—
No happier mother in the world to-night.

* * * * *

Again the Christmas stars swing in the sky,
Once more I sit beside the downy nest :
No fair sweet baby lies in rosy sleep,
Ah me ! the pillow is so smooth, unpressed.

I clasp the little stocking while the tears
Come swift, unbidden. Those dear rosy feet
Will never more be bruised in life's rough ways ;
For touch of baby feet they were not meet.

Full well I know the blessedness of heaven.
The sweet child saint who through the long days
bore
His cross of pain, walks with the Christ to-night.
Could all the passion of my love crave more ?

Ah, truly I am blessed above you all.
Yet tears, you say ? Alas ! I think that so,
Through lenses such as these, our falling tears,
We see life's highest blessings here below.

BEST.

MOTHER, I see you with your nursery light
Leading your babies, all in white,
To their sweet rest ;
Christ, the Good Shepherd, carries mine to-night,
And that is best.

I cannot help tears when I see them twine
Their fingers in yours, and their bright curls shine
On your warm breast ;
But the Saviour's is purer than yours or mine—
He can love best.

You tremble each hour because your arms
Are weak ; your heart is wrung with alarms,
And sore oppressed ;
My darlings are safe, out of reach of harms,
And that is best.

You know over yours may hang even now
Pain and disease, whose fulfilling slow
Naught can arrest ;
Mine in God's garden run to and fro,
And that is best.

You know that, of yours, your feeblest one
And dearest may live long years alone,
Unloved, unblessed ;
Mine are cherished of saints around God's throne,
And that is best.

You must dread for yours the crime that sears,
Dark guilt unwashed by repentant tears,
And unconfessed !
Mine entered spotless on eternal years,
O, how much the best !

But grief is selfish ; I cannot see
Always why I should so stricken be
More than the rest.
But I know that, as well as for them, for me
God did the best ! H. H.

LIFTED OVER.

As tender mothers guiding baby steps,
When places come at which the tiny feet
Would trip, lift up the little ones in arms
Of love and set them down beyond the harm,
So did our Father watch the precious boy
Led o'er the stones by me, who stumbled oft
Myself but strove to help my darling on :
He saw the sweet limbs faltering, and saw

Rough ways before us, where my arms would fail ;
So reached from heaven, and lifting the dear child,
Who smiled in leaving me, he put him down
Beyond all hurt, beyond my sight, and bade
Him wait for me ! Shall I not then be glad,
And, thanking God, press on to overtake ?

H. H.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW.

ONCE, as I wandered down the street,
I saw at a window a face so sweet—
The tiny face of a baby girl,
With a soft, clear eye, and a silken curl—
And I looked o'er my shoulder again to see
The sweet, sweet face that smiled on me
With a look in the eyes that seemed to say,
“ I've come from heaven, but not to stay.”

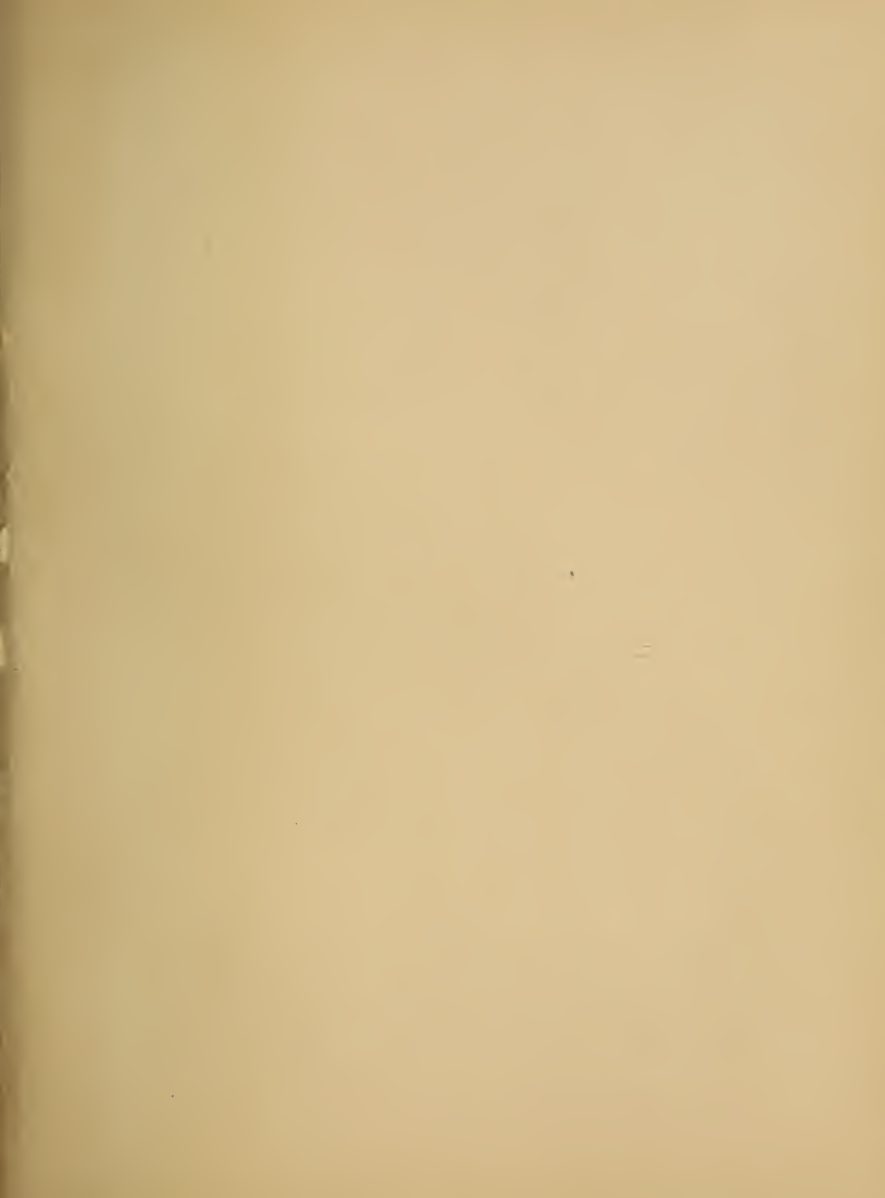
Adown the street as I walked again
I looked for the face at the window pane ;
But the blind was drawn, and I heard it said,
As I passed along, that the child was dead.
O happy baby ! O cherub girl,
Borne up out of the din and whirl—

Out of the sorrow and saddened strife
That burden even the brightest life—
Out of the darkness and out of the gloom,
A bud in the garden of God to bloom—
Safe from danger and care and cold—
Sheltered for ever within the fold.

* * * * *

Sweet, sweet face with the soulful eyes,
Look from the windows of God's fair skies—
Look with those beauteous orbs of thine
And draw me nearer to things divine.
Walking along life's troubled way
Let me look up, as I looked that day,
And know that a fair and cherub face
Smiles upon me through leagues of space.
Help me to keep from the snares, my sweet,
That lie unnumbered about my feet ;
Watch when I stumble, that I may rise
Cheered by the light of thy smiling eyes,
And when my journey of life is done
May I see thy face, O cherub one !

ELLA WHEELER.



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